

Book Reviews

All unsigned reviews were made by Editor.

Natural History and Ecology

A HERD OF RED DEER, F. Fraser Darling, 226 pp., \$1.25, Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1964.

This is an inexpensive and excellent reprint of an ecological classic. Fraser Darling's love of his subject glows through his technical descriptions of the behavior of the red deer which he observed in Scotland. "This book," he says, "tries to give the plain tale of an animal's life, of the things it does and is trying to do, of its relations with its fellows and with men, and of the things to which, as long observation leads me to believe, it responds." The "plain tale" is a fascinating story, well worth the modest price.

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TO THE MOUNTAINS OF THE STARS, L. D. Brongersma and G. F. Venema, 318 pp., \$5.95, Doubleday and Company, New York 22, 1963.

This is a beautifully illustrated travel book about New Guinea. Many of the scenes will be familiar to those who saw the film, "The Sky Above, The Mud Below."

There is a lot of mud, waiting for transportation, and staunch overcoming of difficulties during an expedition to the Mountains of the Stars. Everything is set in awe-inspiring scenery and flavored with contacts with primitive people. It is fine reading for a winter evening.

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THE ECOLOGY OF NORTH AMERICAN, Victor E. Shelford, 610 pp., \$10.00, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Illinois, 1963.

Marston Bates says that sociologists tend to talk as if nature did not exist and ecologists as if man did not exist. If the present book is to be criticized it must be on the basis that it is gloriously oblivious of man. The animal and plant communities of North America are described as they existed hundreds of years ago with only occasional mention of the fact that mere fragments remain to be studied or that certain associations have been almost completely obliterated by human activity. Personally, I enjoy this approach thoroughly, but it may be confusing to a younger generation who fail to understand that Shelford is talking about the country they live in.

With that reservation in mind, I consider this book to be the definitive work on the descriptive ecology of North America. It is thorough, systematic, and beautifully illustrated. It represents the culmination of years of study and perhaps the final synthesis of the work of a whole school of ecology which began with the pioneer work of Shelford and others on the now disputed sand dunes of Lake Michigan.

Shelford's approach is bioecological with emphasis throughout on communities and biomes. This approach is now in disrepute among ecologists, but I firmly believe that it is essential as a basis for further studies. Without such a basis ecology is laboring in a vacuum. There remains the Herculean task of integrating the knowledge of the man-influenced environments with the natural communities and biomes.

After a brief introductory chapter on the scope and meaning of ecology, Shelford proceeds directly to the description of the main biotic features of the continent. The chapter headings describe the general trend of the discussion: temperate deciduous forest (northern and upland regions), temperate deciduous forest (southern and lowland regions), floodplain forest biotic communities in the deciduous forest and grassland biomes, boreal coniferous forests, and montane coniferous forest and alpine communities, tundra biome, northern Pacific coast rainy western hemlock forest and mountain communities, summer drought or broad sclerophyll-grizzly bear community, cold desert and semidesert communities, ecotone woodland and bushland communities, marginal contacts of the temperate grassland, northern temperate grassland, southern temperate grassland, hot desert, tropical deciduous forest and related communities with a dry season, oak and pine forests, cloud forests, and other mountain communities, and communities of southern Florida, Cuba, and the shores of the mainland. Through all of these the plant components are described first and the animals discussed with the plant association in mind.

To appreciate this book fully, one must realize that Victor E. Shelford is one of the pioneers of ecology in America. His early works were inspirations to a whole generation of workers. Disillusionment came to many, not because the methods were at fault but because they were incapable of the labor required for carrying out their projects. Shelford, himself, preserved, and the present book represents a magnificent justification of his pioneer efforts.

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